GENESIS 38

Judah and Tamar

1 Just after this happened, Judah left[i] his brothers[ii] and settled down[iii] near a certain Adullamite, whose
name was Hirah. **2** Then Judah saw a daughter of a certain Canaanite man. Her name was Shuah. He
married her. After they had sex, **3** She conceived and gave birth to a son. He called his name Er.[iv] **4** Then
she conceived again and gave birth to a son. She called his name Onan.[v] **5** Then she conceived yet again
and gave birth to a son. She called his name Shelah.[vi] Judah was at Chezib when she gave birth to him.

6 A while later, Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn. Her name was Tamar.[vii] **7** Now Er, Judah's firstborn,
was wicked in the sight of Yahveh. So Yahveh killed him.

8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go to your brother's wife,[viii] marry her, and raise up descendants for your
brother."[ix]

9 But Onan knew that those children would not legally be his. So, when he had sex with her, he would not
let her get pregnant. He spilled his sperm on the ground. In that way, she would not have a child that they
would consider to be his brother's. **10** Now this thing which he did displeased Yahveh. Therefore, Yahveh
killed him as well.

11 Then Judah told Tamar, his daughter-in-law, "Go back to your father's house.[x] Remain a widow until
my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "What if[xi] he also dies, just like his brothers did?"[xii]

So Tamar went and lived in her father's house. **12** In the process of time, Judah's wife, the daughter of
Shuah, died. After Judah recovered from his grief, he went up to his sheepshearers at Timnath. He went
with his friend Hirah, the Adullamite.

13 Someone told Tamar about this, saying, "I saw your father-in-law going to Timnath to shear his sheep."

Tamar's Plan

14 So she took her widow's garments off, and[xiii] covered her face with a veil, and disguised herself. Then
she sat in an open place on the way to Timnath. She did this because she knew that Shelah was now an
adult and that Judah had not arranged the marriage.

15 When Judah saw her, he thought[xiv] she was a harlot because she had covered her face. **16** So he turned
to her by the way. Then he said, "Come! Let me have sex with you (for he did not know that she was his
daughter-in-law)."

And she said, "What will you pay me for sex?"

17 He said, "I will send you a male goat from the flock."

Then she said, "Will you give me a pledge, until you send it?"

18 And he said, "What pledge[xv] do you want?"

So she said, "Give me your signet ring on the cord,[xvi] and the staff that is in your hand."

And he gave them to her. When he had sex with her, she conceived by him. **19** After she got up, she went
back home. She took off her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.

20 Meanwhile, Judah sent the male goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite. He was also to get his
pledge back from the woman's hand. However, he didn't find her. **21** Then he asked the men of that place.
He said, "Where is the harlot, who was openly by the wayside?"

But they said, “There was no harlot in this place.”

22 When he returned to Judah, he said, “I could not find her. The men of the place also said that there was no harlot in that place.”

23 So Judah said, “Let her have the pledges. Otherwise,[xvii] we will be ashamed[xviii] *by publicly looking for her*. Look! I sent this male goat, but you did not find her.”

24 And about three months later, they told Judah, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has played the harlot. Look! She is with child[xix] by whoredom.”

Then Judah said, “Drag her out of her house and burn her.”

25 As they were bringing her out, she sent her father-in-law a message. It said, “I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong.” She also said, “Please identify who owns these things: the signet ring on a cord and staff.”

Eastern Righteousness

26 Judah acknowledged that those things were his. He said, “She has been more righteous[xx] than me because I did not give her my son Shelah.”

He never had sex with her again. **27** When the time came for her to give birth, she knew that there were twins in her womb. **28** As she was giving birth, one of the twins put out his hand. So the midwife tied a scarlet thread on his hand. She said, “This one came out first.”

What Do You See (? or !)

29 And it came to pass, as he pulled his hand back, that his brother came out. Then the midwife exclaimed, “How did you break out?!”[xxi, xxii]

Therefore, they called his name “Pharez.”[xxiii] **30** And after that, his brother came out. He had the scarlet thread on his hand. They called his name “Zarah.”[xxiv, xxv]

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i The Hebrew מֵאֶת means “from his brothers.” It is Mem-**Aleph**-**Tav**. The letter Mem represents waters. So, Mem-**Aleph**-**Tav** represents Judah flowing away from (leaving) the covenant of God. See the article “The **Aleph**-**Tav**.”

ii There are four subgroups of brothers with all that sibling rivalry. Reuben tried and failed to usurp family leadership. Those scars are still there. Judah has left the family. For all practical purposes, the pagan culture has assimilated Judah. Jacob’s family is on the verge of vanishing from history. What follows is the invisible hand of God at work preserving His chosen family.

iii Judah has left Jacob’s family. God’s covenant family has begun to splinter apart. He has set his course to be assimilated into the Canaanite culture. Divine intervention is needed or Lucifer will be able to thwart God’s Gen 3:15 prophecy about the “Promised Seed.” God’s remedy for this breakup is Tamar! !

iv Er means “awake.”

v Onan means “strong.”

vi Selah means “a petition.”

vii Tamar means “palm tree.”

viii The Hebrew אִשָּׁת is an **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav**. The **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav** is the first (**Aleph**) love (*Shin*=flames) of the marriage (**Tav** = covenant). This is why Strong’s defines the word as woman or wife. The deeper meaning is that Tamar was the mother of God’s covenant tribe of Judah. God uses and blesses these women.

ix This is the Levirate marriage (Deut 25). When the husband dies without a son, there is no inheritance for the family. The brother of the dead husband was to take the widowed woman as a wife and raise up a son for her inheritance.

[x] Since Tamar had married into his family, she was his responsibility. To send her back to her family was not normal. He publicly disgraced her.

[xi] The Hebrew particle פֶּן (*peyn*) with the imperfect verb form introduces a preventative warning about what could happen if no restraint is shown. The English "if," "lest," or "otherwise" convey this warning. See also Gen 3:22, Gen 26:7, Deut 4:19, and Psa 2:12 for other examples.

[xii] Judah somehow blames Tamar for what happened. He is out of touch with God. He does not turn to God. This is why Tamar is so under appreciated. Her actions — even more than what this story tells — brings Judah back to Jacob.

[xiii] The literary technique of Polysyndeton uses multiple "and"s (or other conjunctions) in a series. It slows the reader and gives emphasis to each item. Each step in this process is part of a deliberate ruse.

[xiv] The Hebrew חָשַׁב means consider, count, devise, esteem, invent, plot, reckon, think. Every step in the disguise was needed to fool Judah.

[xv] The Hebrew אֶתֶּן is an **Aleph**-**Tav**-Nun. It refers to giving when referring to an oath, covenant, or promise. Tamar pretends to negotiate a sex-for-wages contract. She really isn't interested in either sex or wages. She wants an heir. See the article "The **Aleph**-**Tav**."

[xvi] The Hebrew פְּתִילֶךָ is from פָּתִיל. In all but two places the translation is cord, thread, or ribbon. In that culture, the signet was a cylinder with a hole down the center through which a cord or rope went so that it hung around the neck. The signet was the equivalent of our credit card. It served as identification and its impression served as a signature. It was almost like asking for a blank check or his personal credit card.

[xvii] The Hebrew particle פֶּן (*peyn*) with the imperfect verb form introduces a preventative warning about what could happen if no restraint is shown. The English "if," "lest," or "otherwise" convey this warning. See also Gen 3:22, Gen 26:7, Deut 4:19, and Psa 2:12 for other examples.

[xviii] The Hebrew בּוּז (*booz*) means contempt, despise, disrespect.

[xix] Pregnant.

[xx] We in the West completely misunderstand what Judah means. Loyalty to a relationship is a significant component of righteousness. Tamar, in spite of her behavior, showed loyalty to Jacob's family. See the article "Eastern Righteousness."

[xxi] This is another delightful play on words that is impossible to accurately translate.

If you only see the midwife speaking, there must be a **QUESTION** mark: How did you break out? She had no idea what was happening.

But if you see the Holy Spirit speaking, there must be an **EXCLAMATION** mark: "This child has broken forth!" The story of Tamar shows God's providential work in preserving this splintering family. Tamar will use the boy to bring Judah back into Jacob's splintering family. Tamar does not get enough credit for her part in unifying this splintering family!

The question mark comes first to reflect the natural human confusion. The exclamation hints at the divine wonder.

Pharez is a type of Christ who breaks forth from the shattered ruins of human depravity. With an eternal surprise, God has broken forth with His love shed upon us through Jesus. Jesus came from the most unlikely places and lineage. Fallen depraved humanity brought forth divinity and the offer of human life.

I truly hope that you can see how HE has broken forth! ! !

[xxii] The Hebrew עָלֶיךָ פָּרֶץ means "He has broken out for yourself!" The one who she thought would be the firstborn was overtaken by the one who actually came out first. This is an unexpected reversal. It fits a recurring Bible theme. God often choose the least expected person. This is a turning point in the splintering of Jacob's family. An **EXCLAMATION** mark fits well. Indeed, it is required! See the article "The Tenth Man."

[xxiii] Pharez means "breach."

[xxiv] Zarah means "rising."

[xxv] The names of Boaz, Ruth, Obed, Jesse, and David are each encrypted in this passage by an equidistance letter sequence (ELS) interval of 49. We are looking at the family tree of King David encrypted in the Book of Genesis. See the article: "Gen 38 ELS 49 Boaz to David." See also Chuck Missler, "The Genealogy of Christ," *Koinonia House*, Dec 01, 2020, https://www.khouse.org/personal_update/articles/2020/genealogy-christ.